(d) whether Government have signed any agreement with foreign countries to set up joint ventures in the country and abroad; and

(e) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF MINES (SHRI BALRAM SINGH YADAV): (a) to (c) To attract investment domestic or foreign and thereby speed up the pace of mineral development, the National Mineral Policy 1993 and the Mines and Mineral (Regulation and Development) Act, 1957 as amended in 1994 have opened up all non-atomic and non-fuel mineral for exploitation by Private Sector.

(d) and (e) The Government of India have not entered into any agreement with foreign countries to set up joint ventures. However, the protocol signed with France and the Minutes signed with China during the visit of a high level delegation to China inter alia envisages scouting for joint venture opportunities in the mineral sector in India and in other countries. However, Hindustan Zinc Limited, a Public Sector Undertaking under the administrative control of Ministry of Mines has signed Memorandum of Understanding with foreign firms for exploration of Gold and base metals in India and Vietnam.

Protest by Delhi University Teachers

1825. SHRI G. Y. KRISHNAN: Will the Minister of STEEL be pleased to state:

(a) whether Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Ltd. (KIOCL) has struck gold at its iron ore mines in Karnataka, attracting two of the World's leading gold mining companies;

(b) if so, the proportion of gold detected in iron ore piles at Kudremukh;

(c) the estimated iron ore reserves of the KIOCL; and

(d) the steps being taken for prospecting after carrying out tests on the mines by the gold mining companies?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF STEEL (SHRI SONTOSH MOHAN DEV): (a) Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Ltd. (KIOCL) has reported that preliminary tests conducted by Bharat Gold Mines Limited (BGML) on the iron ore tailings at Kudremukh showed the presence of traces of gold in some samples of iron ore tailings. A leading Australian company also visited Kudremukh and collected samples for analysis.

(b) KIOCL has reported that based on preliminary tests by BGML, the indicated content of gold in a few samples of iron ore tailings is 0.5 grams per tonne on an average.

(c) Estimated balance of iron ore reserves in the existing Kudremukh mines is about 270 million tonnes while estimated deposit of iron ore tailings in the reservoir is about 100 million tonnes.

(d) Detailed prospecting by way of collecting and analysing samples of borcholes drilled on the Lakhya Dam tailings of Kudremukh mines is being carried out at present.

Alloy Steel Plant Durgapur

1826. SHRI GHUFRAN AZAM: Will the Minister of STEEL be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the Alloy Steel Plant, Durgapur has been diverting their products for wagon industry to manufacture municipal dust-bins;

(b) whether orders have been placed with the Alloy Steel Plant, Durgapur by Bombay and Calcutta municipalities;

(c) if so, the details thereof; and

(d) what are the reasons for diverting costly alloy steel for this purpose and what steps Government have taken to stop the process?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF STEEL (SHRI SONTOSH MOHAN DEV): (a) to (c) Owing to curtailment of wagon orders by the Indian Railways, the off take of SAILCOR, a new grade of steel which has

superior corrosion resistance and strength, had come down resulting in under-utlisation of capacity for manufacrtue of this grade of steel at Alloy Steel Plant/SAIL.

As a resule, ASP/SAIL have had to seek alternative markets for this grade of steel. After ascertaining, that similar grades of steel are being extensively used in other countris for manufacture of garbage countainers, in thermal industry and in coal industry, SAIL has supplied five containers to Calcutta Municipal Corporation as a trial lot. Further discussions are also going on with the Bombay Municipal Corporation for a similar order.

(d) The question of diversion of costly material does not arise. As the Railways are not lifting this material in sufficient quantity for manufacture of wagons, ASP/SAIL will have to continuously seek new, alternative markets for promoting this grade of steel in order to utilise full available capacity.

Mini Steel Plants

1827. SHRI P. UPENDRA: Will the Minister of STEEL be pleased to state:

(a) whether a large number of mini steel plants in the country incurring losses and many remain closed;

(b) what are the reasons for the mini steel industry becoming sick; and

(c) what steps Government are taking to revive the sick units?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF STEEL (SHRI SONTOSH MOHAN DEV): (a) to (c) There are at present 181 Electric Are Furnace (EAF) units. These units are primarily in the private sector. The EAF industry is characterised by a predominance of small sized furnaces which are not able to adopt modern technological features. Coupled with this, labour, financial and managerial problems faced by these units led to the closure of a number of units over a period of time, and as on 31-12-94, 89 units were reported to be closed. In addition, their performance has been adversely affected by the rise in the international prices of scrap, which constitutes their basic raw material, and other factors like high power tariff.

Government has reduced the import duty on steel melting scrap from 12.5 percent to 5 percent to improve the performance of the EAF units.

State Governments have been advised to consider supplying uninterrpted power to these units, at concessional rates.

In addition, Office of Development Commissioner of Iron & Steel has set up a "Core Group" to assist those of the units which are interested in drawing up revival strategies.

Hindustan Steel Construction Limited

1828. SHRI JIBON ROY: Will the Minister of STEEL be pleased to state:

(a) what was the manpower of Hindustan Steel Construction Ltd. during the period 1992-93 and 1993-94;

(b) whether it is a fact that 5000 workers of HSCL are likely to be declared surplus; and

(c) if so, the reason thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF STEEL (SHRI SONTOSH MOHAN DEV): (a) The man-power in Hindustan Steelworks Construction Limited (HSCL) as on 31.3.1993 and 31.3.1994 was 18381 and 16726 respectively.

(b) and (c) Keeping in view the present order booking position and nature of its activities, present manpower of HSCL is considered to be high. Voluntary Retirement Scheme has been under operation since 1988 as reduction in establishment cost would help improve the financial position of HSCL is a lose making company.